

# **Engaging Researchers in Museum Exhibit Development: Lessons from NASA Ames and the California Academy of Sciences**

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NASA Ames Research Center's astrobiology team and the California Academy of Sciences (CAS) have implemented a partnership to develop astrobiological content for museum exhibits. Because its exhibits include astronomy, natural history and marine biology, CAS shares a broad interface with astrobiology research and exploration. The CAS-Ames collaboration has resulted in a small exhibit that opened in April 2004 and a preliminary structure for future collaborations.

One factor in the success of this partnership is the active participation of CAS in monthly ARC astrobiology team meetings. Face-to-face interactions were vital during early stages of the partnership. The PI scheduled EPO presentations alongside research talks, thus giving them equal weight and consideration. Social interactions helped cement working relationships between team members.

Secondly, by receiving updates on the pace and process of exhibit development, the scientists became better educated about the challenges of informal learning. Prior to this project, few astrobiology researchers had been involved in the evaluation, development, prototyping and design of exhibits. ARC team members became more aware of their roles and how they could effectively contribute.

Finally, the collaboration permitted different levels of involvement. Therefore those scientists who didn't have as much time could still contribute images while those who were more extensively involved contributed to story development, fact-checking, brainstorming, and specimen preparation. Whatever their level of contribution, team members felt that they could contribute and were able to see tangible results relatively quickly. This positive feedback added to their sense of contribution and commitment to EPO efforts and future collaborations.